

dustrious, I should say, according to his lights; and honest; and not stupid—setting one thing against another, I should say not stupid. But it was easy to see, from the first, that he wanted ballast; and on the whole I daresay I'm well rid of him before worse has happened. But young men's ideas go up high now-a-days—and his wages haven't been exorbitant—I couldn't in conscience call 'em so. There's one thing I've made up my mind to—I won't raise the wages, if I keep the situation open from now till Christmas. It won't be the first time in my life that I've worked double-tides.'

Mr. Nargles stepped out more briskly under the stimulating influence of his reflection, and his brown face looked very keen and very hard as he fought his way along in the teeth of the wind. There was no slackness about him, or loss of interest in the concerns of life. All his thoughts were centred on his business, and his success, and his determination not to pay another penny in wages to his clerk, if he worked double-tides for months before he could replace Tom Dixon at the same figure. And Tom and Alice Dixon, as a man and woman in extremity, Joseph Nargles did not think of at all—their despair seemed to glide off from the surface of his mind, leaving no impression upon it.

As he reached the church the great clock in the tower struck five, booming out the hour in slow, deep strokes, which could be heard far out to sea. He knew that he should find the crypt open; for the men did not leave work till six, and he determined that they should stay till seven if they had not finished their task.

Mr. Nargles went into the church, taking off his hat from the force of habit, but not bethinking himself of offering any prayer. He attended Divine service regularly on Sundays, but it was in an official capacity, which does not necessarily involve personal devotion.

And in truth Mr. Nargles considered personal devotion rather a weakness, and his manner in church plainly conveyed his opinion that attendance there was as much a matter of business as his weekly avocations could be. So he tramped through the church noisily on this occasion, and descended the stairs leading to the crypt, putting on his hat again because the air which came up was damp and cold and mouldy.

The stairs were very awkward, and the light was dim; he had to move carefully, holding on to the dusty ledges of the jutting stones. And down below the light was even dimmer and more uncertain, in the catacomb which extended beyond the area covered by the pavement of the church. The roof of this great vault rested upon massive coffins, which would last for all time it was supposed.

Warriors and nobles had been laid each in his place, with solemn chanting and lamentations; but the workmen went among the ancient coffins with complete unconcern now, and Mr. Nargles, looking round, saw a lantern and some tools set down upon one of them near the foot of the uneven steps. He heard rough voices, and a great rumbling in the distance.

'A lazy set, I'll be bound,' he said to himself. 'Take a deal of looking after, they do.'

And he walked on, feeling almost giddy as his sight became accustomed to the dusky atmosphere, and he could see the ordered rows of massive pillars which supported the whole fabric of St. Cuthbert's stretching out beyond him and narrowing into denser gloom.

He reached the spot at which he expected

to find the workmen, but they were not there. They had finished at that point, apparently; and Mr. Nargles put on his spectacles, peering about to see that the work of reparation had been properly done. Not much amiss, he thought; really, nothing much amiss in that job. Might have left the place a little tidier—swept up the dust and chips and so on; he rather thought he would send them back to see to that. Then he went on to another angle of the crypt where he expected to find the men—but they had finished there, too. And again Mr. Nargles' spectacles showed nothing at which he could justly take exception, as he peered through them at the solid masonry.

The rumbling in the distance and the sound of rough voices had ceased; but as he turned away from his inspection he heard

by a strange change in the air more indescribable still.

'Bless me!' said Mr. Nargles, aloud—and his voice sounded hollow in the cavernous depths—'I'd better be finding those fellows.'

But 'those fellows' were nowhere to be found.

There were no tools lying about—no traces of the workmen's employment remained; and when Mr. Nargles, groping his way among the pillars, came back to the entrance, the lantern and tools were gone from the sarcophagus on which he had seen them when he came down the broken steps. And he saw, beyond a doubt, that the door which had been open then was closed—a door of tremendous strength and weight and thickness, such as men made long ago when the work of their hands was planned to endure



HE TRIED THE DOOR.

a mysterious reverberation which seemed to resound through the crypt with a kind of awful trembling. The effect was as though a prolonged peal of thunder had suddenly shaken the building to its foundations—and yet the sky had been perfectly clear when Mr. Nargles left the March sunshine behind him as he swung back the heavy west door of the church.

And then, quite suddenly, the idea occurred to him that that mysterious and thrilling noise was such as might be caused by the clanging of a very weighty door pushed with great force upon its rusty stanchions.

And the noise had been succeeded by a stillness such as no words can describe, and

not for months and years, but for countless centuries.

Mr. Nargles looked at this closed door blankly, and a full minute or more passed by before he understood. When he did understand, a cold dew broke out upon his forehead, his limbs shook, and an icy shiver seemed to seize upon his heart.

Could it be that he was locked in?

He tried the door, and shook it with frenzied violence; but it held fast—very fast indeed. It was locked, and barred with the great bars and bolts of long ago; and an army of men could not have burst it open, unless they had blown it to pieces with gunpowder or dynamite. He shouted with the